Road service at 3:45 a.m.-if you have the right connections - and free! 10/19/91

Up too early again I drove to the end of the lane for the papers. The Washington Post was there but not the local paper. Not unusual, so as I often do, I read the Post and listened to the car stereo.

After about 15 minutes I saw headlights and the car seemed to stop at the newspaper box about 250 feet away and then suddenly there were no lights. I worried when they did not come on in a few minutes because the paper is delivered by a young woman, Karen, a single mother with two nice, small kids. So, I drove up to see if I could be of or get help and there was no car at all! I turned around, drove to our lane, and for some reason I cannot explain, started to back in. I actually backed into the ditch, which is close to two feet deep, that deep to carry the water that with a hard rain it cannot hold. When I tried to pull out the car would not move.

So there I was, at an angle because the car was, with a ditch outside the door.

Weekdays there are cars that go past infrequently because there are people who live on this road who sometimes have to get to work early. But Saturdays I have sat there for more than an hour waiting for Karen without seeing a car.

With my car projecting into the roadway I feared returning to the house to phone the police to see if they knew of an all-night towing service because a careless driver could hit my car. So, I decided to wait for Karen who I know has a CB in her car. She also is a former policewoman and I thought she might know who to call.

Fortunately it was only about 15 minutes before she stopped to deliver the Madison's paper, When I saw her headlights I managed to get out through the passenger-side door and was waiting when she stopped.

"What happened to you?" she asked, and I said, "It was all your fault." We laughed after I told her why and how it had happened. I then asked her if she could find someone who could tow me out. Sure, she said, and got onto her CB.

I could not make out the words of the man to whom she was talking but she was quite audible. I got in the car with her when she said she was not leaving until I was safe and the car out.

"He won't be long, " she told me, "He's in Middletown." Middletown is a village about five miles away. I asked her who. She said "My older brother."

"What is he doing up this time of the morning?"I asked and she laughed and said that all of her family delivers papers. He was on his route.

In less than 10 minutes he examined the position of the car, got a chain out, connected it to my front springs and his front bumper, and in no time at all my car was free.

He would not accept payment for this service. And Karen would not leave until she saw me in my car and driving back to the house. I meet her many mornings and she does not leave until I am again in my car.

Three or four years ago she had her children with her when she delivered when she had no baby-sitter. (She had the younger one with her this morning, a pretty little girl who slept through all the conversation, CB communications and noises, and was oblivious to all.)

When I saw she had to have the kids with her when - could I got little trinkets for them. The boy, now about nine, John, got to like me and referred to me to her as "That nice old Man on Old Receiver." When he had a birthday party he wanted Lil and me there and we were.

Sometimes in the summer when the kids were with her and John was wearing shorts only, I could see that he has a remarkable well developed physique for so young a boy. Karen tells me he is a good student, has the highest IQ in his class and it outstanding by other measurements I do not recall. Likes school and likes to read. I've been intending to get him some books but have not gotten around to it.

Not the only kindness of this week.

After an early supper Tuesday because I had my first seminar at Hood that evening I was brushing my teeth when I felt something hard in my mouth. It was a piece of tooth. No pain, so the next morning I phoned the dentist and he squeezed me in. He was able to reattach it and did. We usually then go to the desk and pay the bill. His technician was a minute or two getting there. I asked him how much I owed and she surprised me by saying "Nothing." "How is that?" I asked and she said that when they looked at the chart to make a note on it they discovered that this tooth was the last one they'd repaired, that what happened should not have happened, therefore there was no charge.

I had had no understanding of this, do not recall any dental work on that tooth, and as we left Lil and I wondered who many dentists would be that honest and fair, have this kind of standard for himself and his work.

There are, of course, good people everywhere, and some not so good. But I think we have at least an average share of good people, perhaps more than average.

After the cataract was removed from my better eye several years ago I was not allowed to drive for quite some time. (That was before the awful deBartolos, whose son owns the San Francisco 49ers, bought the mall at which I'd been walking for about 10 years, to which I'll return.) I'd gotten to know the custodial staff rather well and had a friendly relationship with them. When the original owners let us walkers in early, one day I noticed that they had too much work to do some mornings to complete it all before the mall opened. That morning I began what I then did every day, clean the flower planters throughout the mall, this freeing those men for their other work. The morning I began I heard their supervisor tell them to let that go and do the other things they had to do. For this and for other things they liked me. Other things like bringing them free apples from the Madison's surplus. So, when I was not allowed to drive I asked the one I'd known longest, Mayne Erick,

if he could leave home a few minutes earlier and take me to the mall. He did and he would not accept payment. And when his old car wouldn't start he had the coworker who picked him up stop for me, which required driving past the mall to get here. (I gave them both $50 for Xmas.)

When the deBartelos bought this mall, for about four times what it cost to build, one of the first things they did was deny walkers access until 7:30. Next they started putting all their employees on part time. This meant they had no insurance, no health insurance in particular, to pay for part-time employyes. As soon as he got word of this, Wayne and the other fellow drove to Westminster, to where those who'd owned this mall had a new mall, and both were hired, full-time with insurance and retirement benefits.

The mall has deteriorated and the deBartelos are wasting a considerable amount of money because what they have done costs ever so much more than the insurance and other bemefits they cheated their employees out of. (meanwhile, when they or thei children are ill, the county provides the medical care and the rest of us pay for it in our taxes.) To get the work done that two or three men had done the mall now has to hire private contractors.They have at least as many man-hours on their payroll, perhaps even more. But the work does not get done so they have to contract some out, including some of the cleaning and all attention to and maintainance of the heating and cooling systems. Yet they can afford to pay million-dollar salaries to their football players.

Their restriction of the walkers cost them about 200 customers to begin with and I'm certain many more who are friends of the walkers.

When Dave Wrone is here he usually meets me at the mall for 8:30 breakfast, the time the restaurants there open. One night he'd asked me how many walkers there were. I did not know so the next morning I started counting until Dave got there. I was over 200 without having seen all I knew walked there, some coming later, when Dave came. Almost all of these walkers drove to a newer and larger mall whose ownership and management realized that the walkers were potential customers. So, they permitted entrance at 6:30, got medical histories and doctors and families to notify in case of accident, created a walkers' club, and had free coffee for the walkers. That mall seems to be doing very well. My belief is that the deBartelo mall now has only about half the traffic it had.

It is not only the deBartelos who switched to part-time employees under the Reagan generosity to the wealthiest. The stores, already low-paying, also did. All the better waitresses immediately got much better jobs at better restauraants where the tips were better. And some of the store manggers got so little some of those women quit to take factory jobs. One assistant manager of a dress shop got paid less than I paid boys for doing the mowing for me. And as management got no overtime!

When I was not allowed to drive other walkers drove me home.None would accept any payment.